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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, MAY 18-23

REF: A. NEW DELHI 8243

¶B. NEW DELHI 1681
¶C. 06 NEW DELHI 6886

Classified By: Acting PolCouns Atul Keshap for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for May 18-23, 2007 that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

-- Crude Bombs in UP Point to Internal Politics
-- India Gives the Green Light for Civil Servants to Visit China
-- Indian Army Chief Begins China Tour
-- The UPA Accepts the Recommendations of the Sachar Report on Muslim Minorities
-- OBC Quota Debate Rages On
-- None Injured in Bhutan Bombing

Crude Bombs in UP Point to Internal Politics

¶1. (C) Three low intensity blasts in a crowded shopping area of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh (UP), on May 22, injured six people, but killed no one. The bombs were placed in tiffin lunch boxes and tied to bicycles. Police described the bombs as "light" or "crude." Press reports said further that in Faizabad on May 23, police found 10 kg of explosives and 20 liters of ammonium nitrate at a railway station. Faizabad is just ten kilometers from Ayodhya, which has been the center of communal tension following the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992 and subsequent riots, while Gorakhpur was wracked by communal riots earlier in the year and is the site of a famous temple which is a Hindu pilgrimage site.

(Comment: The crude nature of these bombs, which exploded but did not kill anyone despite going off in a crowded market-place, suggests that this is not the hand of Lashkar-e-Taiba or other Pakistan-based groups. Rather, this may point to the violent, mafioso-style politics typical of UP, especially so close to a change in governments. The defeated government of Mulayam Singh Yadav had close associations with UP crime gangs and often used them to incite communal riots or attack political enemies. UP contacts speculate that these elements may be trying to put

the new Bahujan Samaj Party government of Chief Minister Mayawati off balance. As with other bombings across India there was little communal tension in response, although the Vishva Hindu Parishad organized a complete shut down (bandh) of shops in the aftermath of the blasts. End Comment.)

India Gives the Green Light for Civil Servants to Visit China

¶2. (C) Signaling a significant change in internal policy, the Government of India's (GOI) prestigious Administration Service (IAS) is sending its entire class of 1991 to visit China May 25-June 10, the Hindustan Times (HT) quoted IAS Officer from the Orissa cadre, Satyabrata Sahu, May 21. HT was unable to obtain details of the visit, but quoted sources as saying that the MEA has given political clearance to all of its 1991 officers. Our Locally Engaged Staff have ascertained that this is the first time a group of IAS officials such as this has been given clearance for official overseas travel. Post stopped submitting IAS officers for the International Visitors Program (IVP) a few years ago due to snags in candidates receiving the necessary MEA and Ministry of Home Affairs clearances for official visits abroad.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: While the GOI reportedly mulls over similar overtures from Japan and France, this recent IAS announcement may reflect the support of Communist Party Marxist (CPM) officials in senior government positions who never worry about possible recruitment by their Communist brethren to the north, even as they continue to be paranoid of the perceived risks from the capitalist west. The silver lining is that the next generation of India's administration

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will realize how far they must get to catch up to China. END COMMENT

Indian Army Chief Begins China Tour

¶4. (SBU) India's Chief of the Army Staff General J.J. Singh began his five-day China tour with a call on his Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie on May 21. Singh is also scheduled to visit military institutions and units in Wuhan, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. The May 21 edition of "The Hindu" reports that the visit will focus on the modalities for the first ever joint military exercises as a follow up to the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the defense ministries last year, signaling a new era of military cooperation. Post will report more details via front channel cable.

The UPA Accepts the Recommendations of the Sachar Report on Muslim Minorities

¶5. (SBU) The Sachar Panel's report on the socio-economic and educational status of Muslim minorities kicked up considerable heat and dust a few months ago and has now reached the implementation stage. At a United Progressive Alliance (UPA) meeting chaired by PM Singh on May 17, the Cabinet approved the Sachar Committee's recommendations for drastic steps to bring Muslims into the mainstream. The government will focus on 90 Muslim-dominated districts and will set up four committees on 1) equal opportunity, 2) a national data bank, 3) education and skill development, and 4) identification of (other) minority-dominated districts. Media reports quoted Sonia Gandhi as saying, &It is really a paradox that in our country, which produces eminent scientists, we have the largest number of illiterates also.⁸ For more information on the Sachar report, see reftel A.

OBC Quota Debate Rages On

¶6. (SBU) On May 17, the Supreme Court ruled that the UPA's

hotly debated 27 percent reservation of all seats in publicly-funded institutions for Otherwise Backward Classes (OBCs) must be referred to a larger Constitutional Bench. When Parliament passed the quota law in January, the Supreme Court intervened on March 29 and imposed a stay to halt its implementation, which the Center loudly appealed to revoke. Now, it is unlikely that the OBC quota law will be implemented in time for the coming 2007-2008 academic year, since convincing enough judges to give up their vacations to listen to petitions during India's hot summer months is highly improbable. For history and political undercurrents on this issue, see reftels B and C.

None Injured in Bhutan Bombing

¶7. (U) The main Bhutanese media outlet Kuensel reported that a bomb exploded in a parked bus May 23 in Phuentsholing on the Indian border. No injuries or deaths were reported, as the bus was sitting empty in a workshop at the time. This brings to four the number of incidents of bombs found inside Bhutan in the last seven months:

- a. October 2006: two bombs found in Phuentsholing and safely defused.
- b. December 2006: a bomb exploded in Phuentsholing, wounding four.
- c. March 2007: an IED was found and safely defused in a roadside culvert on the road between Pasakah and Tala.
- d. May 2007: a bomb exploded on a bus in Phuentsholing; none were injured.

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